

# THE SENTINEL.

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## AGRICULTURAL DEPRESSION.

Secretary Rush on Its Causes and Possible Remedies.

The Burden of Farm Mortgages and the Evils of Combinations.

Protection Sought for the Farmer. The Question of Transportation Home and Foreign Competition. Reforms in the System of Taxation.

Washington, D. C., April 2d. — Secretary of Agriculture Rush has today issued the following statement on the present agricultural depression and the possible remedies therefor:

For months past from all parts of the country there have reached me communications, many of them from large bodies of men, all of them from persons deserving consideration, and all of them deeply in earnest respecting the present condition of agricultural depression. In most cases the communications suggest the conviction of the writers, not only as to the gravity of the emergency, but also to its cause or causes and possible remedies, and all of my views on the subject. To answer each one of these communications separately would be more than any one man can undertake to do, and, moreover, I am reluctant to send out an expression of my views in letters covering merely a phase or a portion of the questions involved. Such a course would be unjust to myself and to those who address me. I can only content to express my views, such as they are, on the entire question, reviewing the whole subject and considering it in all its various phases.

It would be a work of supererogation at this time to undertake to prove the existence of severe agricultural depression. This is universally admitted. The representative farmers and farmers' associations are constantly calling my attention to their condition, urging the necessity for some measure of relief. The situation warrants all the attention which our wisest minds can devote to it. What is to be done? Such is the question which confronts every thinking man. Too many of those who are giving the matter consideration look at it from only one point of view. One attributes the difficulty to the cause, and one to another, and most people seem to regard two or three causes at most as entirely responsible for the present condition of affairs. This is a mistake. The fact, however, explains to a certain extent that some of the remedies proposed, bid fair, if carried out to bring about a result as objectionable as is the present situation. Great disaster is almost very apt to lead to extravagances in laying down rules which may or may not cure the disease. It is only by a very careful diagnosis of the case that we can possibly attain to efficient remedy.

### THE CAUSES.

The present agricultural depression, it seems to me, can be traced to a combination of many causes so many, that probably no one can enumerate them all. I will only endeavor to point out some which seem to me more directly responsible. One may be divided into two classes. (1) Those causes inherent in the farmers themselves, and for which they alone can provide a possible remedy. (2) Those over which the farmer himself has no direct control, and the remedy for which must be provided as far as practicable by law, and for such legislation the responsibility devolves upon the legislative bodies of the states and of the Nation.

I will confine myself to a mere enumeration of the first class of causes enumerated. On many farms, I regret to say, we find a depreciation of the productive power of the land due to careless culture. We find a want too often of knowledge like methods, due to the fact that in earlier times business training was not regarded as an essential preparation for the farmer's work, whereas now, with altered conditions, when every penny and I may say every moment of time has to be profitably accounted for, in the face of the world wide competition, a successful farmer must be well trained and careful in business as the store keeper, and his equal in intelligence and general education. Nor are the important questions of supply and demand of market prices studied with the vigilance which characterizes the methods of our merchants and manufacturers. These last, moreover, have the advantages of transacting their business in immediate proximity to trade centers, where the widest information in reference thereto is readily obtainable. Our farmers' organizations are actively seeking to supplement this want for the farmer the agricultural press is earnestly working in the same direction, and one of the most important duties devolving upon this department consists in gathering and promptly distributing reliable information on all those subjects which are especially interesting to the farmer.

**THE VALUE OF INFORMATION.**  
It remains for him to avail himself of the information thus supplied which will protect him not only against over-supply of certain products, but against possible overreaching on the part of speculators. The farmer must look with suspicion upon any attempts to obtrude the sources of his information. His advantage will always be in the fullest knowledge of the facts. He must carefully study the character and the quality of his products rather than mere quantity, and always bear in mind, that whether prices are high or low, it is always the best goods at the best obtainable prices that are the most readily sold. Many of our farmers have been led astray, and feel themselves the owners of more land than they can properly care for in view of the comparatively high price of labor in the rural districts, and in view of the fact that but a small portion of mankind, comparatively, can profitably control the labor of others. The prudent farmer will limit his efforts to that which he can efficiently perform. Again, more attention must be given, especially on our western farms,

to the raising by the farmer, for his own use, of everything that may be utilized by himself and his household, as far as soil and climate will permit.

I have passed over these various causes briefly. I do not deem it necessary to dwell upon them at length, but will merely reiterate the fact, that for them the remedy is feasible, and it depends upon the farmers themselves to provide it. No one can release them of that responsibility, but I am thankful to say that, owing to their own efforts, there exist to-day in many states, valuable instruments capable of materially aiding them in their work, and to-day, in this country, no farmer need be without all the aid that knowledge and science can impart.

### THE MORTGAGE.

The burden of mortgages upon farms, homes, and lands is unquestionably discouraging, in the extreme, and while in some cases no doubt this load may have been too readily assumed, still, in the majority of cases, the mortgage has been the result of necessity. I except, of course, such mortgages as represent balances of purchase money which are rather evidences of the farmer's ambition and enterprise, than of his poverty. On the other hand, those mortgages with which land has been encumbered from the necessities of its owner, drawing high rates of interest, often taxed in addition with a heavy commission, have to-day, in the face of continued depression in the prices of staple products, become very inconvenient in many instances to the farmer with less of home and land. It is a question of grave difficulty to all those who seek to remedy the ills from which our farmers are suffering. At present prices the farmer finds that it takes more of his products to get a dollar whereby to pay back the dollar borrowed than it did when he borrowed it. The interest accumulates, while payment of the principal seems utterly hopeless, and the very depression which we are discussing makes the renewal of the mortgage most difficult. Many people are disposed to associate this phase of the subject with the question of an undue limitation of our currency. Many carry this line of argument to extremes, but it is by no means impossible that these subjects are correlated. However the question of currency is not receiving special attention from another branch of the governmental legislation on the subject is now pending before congress and satisfactory solution of this vexed problem.

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### TRANSPORTATION.

The question of transportation is one of profound interest to the American farmer. The trouble begins near home, between the farm and the nearest railroad station. It would be difficult to estimate the amount of loss in time and labor, in depreciation and wear and tear of horses and conveyances, entailed upon the farmers by the wretched condition of country roads before arriving at the station; he there meets the vexed question of freight rates, a difficult one to settle satisfactorily to all parties under any circumstances, but in many cases still further complicated by the condition of our whole railroad system. Many of the roads were built at a time and under conditions that greatly enhanced their cost. Comparative statistics present comparisons of inequality which often seem like injustice, and on the other hand it must not be forgotten that many roads are overtaking their constituents in an effort to secure dividends upon a total of capital and bonded debt, a portion of which is purely fictitious. That many roads fail to pay any dividends at all, while the total profits of the railroads throughout the country represent but a comparatively small division upon the actual cost of construction, plant and equipment, may still in wise judgment be the gravest wrong of attempting to secure a profit upon fictitious values. It is still too early to suggest any important modifications in the interstate commerce law. A fuller trial is needed to judge properly of its effects and suggest judicious amendments. The condition of our agriculture is such that a large proportion of our farmers must depend upon facilities for reaching distant markets, and the law will hardly accomplish its purpose of securing the greatest good for the greatest number if its ultimate result should be to raise the cost of the long haul. Its most valuable office will be to prevent injustice by forbidding the charging by the railroads of special privileges to certain classes or corporations, to certain cities or corporations, which are denied to the community at large.

Another cause operating to depress the price of the farmer's honest toll is the under-increase of the class of middlemen and the dishonest and greed of many of them. Hence the wide gulf between the high prices charged to the consumer, and the low prices paid to the producer. The middle man within certain limits must be regarded as a necessity. There are many things he can do for the farmers which the latter cannot do so profitably for themselves, and under such conditions it is wise to employ him. The evil which exists at the present day in this direction could undoubtedly be mitigated by first, a familiarity on the part of the farmer himself with the market value of that which he has to sell, and, second, a better system of cooperation among the farmers both in the disposal of their crops and in the purchase of their supplies.

**COMBINATIONS IN FARM INDUSTRIES.**  
Few there are but are familiar with and deplore the conversion of our exchanges and boards of trade, originally designed for the encouragement and convenience of legitimate trading, into vast gambling places, fraught with the greatest danger to the country at large, of which the former, whose products are thus made the toy and plaything of the game, is the innocent but chief sufferer. The frequent and extreme fluctuations of price, even timed by the operation of irresponsible speculators is the bane of the producer, whose best interests will ever be served by the maintenance of a firm and reliable market. To the allegation, not infrequently made, that if at times prices are truly depressed there are also times when they are unduly raised, there is a simple reply. As already ascertained on'ty're are fluctuations and uncertainty the bane of the producer, but the speculative combinations which result in unduly raising or depressing prices are carefully calculated to raise them when the goods are no longer in the producer's hands and depress them when they are. Unquestionably legislation is needed to remedy this evil, and it should be based on the prin-

ciple that the evil is not a necessary one, requiring regulation, but an utterly inexorable one, to be cured by eradication.

Much has been said and written alleging the existence of unlawful combinations for the express purpose of so controlling the markets as to lower the price of the farmer's products, and of other combinations whose object is to increase the price of the articles which the farmer consumes. That such combinations exist is impossible to doubt, and in serious results of their greed and dishonesty are enhanced by the grave difficulties attending any effort to limit their evil effects. This is one of the evils so closely allied to the market in interstate commerce, that its regulation may possibly fail within the legitimate province of national legislation. The great difficulty lies in the close observation of that line of demarcation which clearly exists between combinations for mutual self-help, protection and the advancement by legitimate means of the interests of a class, craft or industry and combinations or trusts inspired by greed, whose objects are unattainable save as they infringe upon the legitimate rights of others. In spite of these difficulties, however, there cannot be any doubt that an earnest demand for adequate legislation on this subject, sustained by popular opinion, securing the earnest attention of our strongest minds, will eventually result in some adequate means of controlling this malignant evil.

### PROTECTION AGAINST TAXES.

I now come to the consideration of one of the greatest evils, in my opinion, of the present agricultural depression, but which I am happy to note can be effectively and directly dealt with through national legislation. Few people realize that our imports of agricultural products, estimated at present paid by the consumers are about equal to our agricultural exports, estimated at present paid by the farmer. The industry abroad has been helped by liberal Government bounties. It is worth while nothing that the price per pound of the great bulk of the sugar exported, was found to be 15¢. He will, however, be compelled to compete with the English beet sugar, which is well set; his should be strong and, save well back, just now enough for a saddle between prices of similar products. The standard used must indicate a power to stand up well under strong difficulties, as they are set well under him with the best of features to take him all over. He is one of the best made horses for all work, in the country. John Ward was bred by Kenton, Kentucky, by a Morgan, by Wm. H. Morgan, by his Old Black Demure, the fountain head of all the Demures. John Ward's first dam by St. Paul Rockaway, by Old Rockaway, by Tom Crozier, by Old Pacific, by Sirs, Pilot, by 2nd dam Lambeth, John Ward's second dam by Old Carter, Kentucky, by a dam Kingcombe's Abundance, by Alexander's Attendant, by Ryders Hambletonian.

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